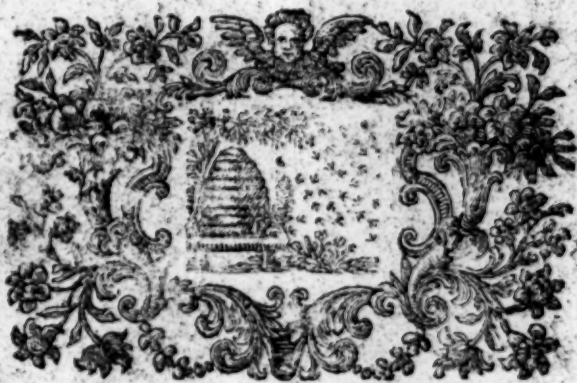


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General V I E W K
O F
RELIGION.



L O N D O N:

Printed for J. ROBERTS at the Oxford-
Arms in Warwick-Lane. 1729.





P R E F A C E.



THE great Disregard with which Religion is treated by some, and the mistaken Notions of it which are entertain'd by others, cannot but justify an Attempt, to establish the Certainty, and retrieve the Beauty and Glory of it. The following Papers are calculated for these Purposes. The Importance of the Subject is herein fairly stated. The great Duties of Religion are shewn to be of an eternal and unalterable Obligation. Its Tendency to the Happiness of Society, and its Consistence with the true Principles of Liberty, are fully demonstrated.

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The Disguises that have been thrown on it will, in the ensuing Course of this Argument, be impartially exposed, and the sacrilegious Abuse of it, to Superstition, Tyranny and Persecution, be represented in so strong a View, as shall clear Religion itself of the vile and scandalous Imputation.

And as bad as the World is, I am still of Opinion, that Religion cannot fail of recommending itself to every sober and impartial Mind, when described in its natural Simplicity. It stands upon the strongest Evidence of Truth, and appears with those attractive Charms, that the Reason and the Consciences of Men cannot, without Violence offered to themselves, resist.

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P R E F A C E. iii

The Author of the following Sheets professes himself attach'd to no Cause but that of Truth; he has no Views of Interest or Party to serve; and is therefore an hearty Friend to the Cause of Religion, because he is persuaded that true Religion is the most friendly Thing in the World to Men.

Any Letters or Discourses upon this Subject, or any other important Concern of Life, directed to the Publisher of this Paper, will be thankfully received, and be made a proper Use of in due Time.

The large Progress of Infidelity, and the daily Increase of Vice, that Bane and Destruction of Societies, call for the Aids of all good Men to
put

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put a Stop to these Evils. This can be done no other Way, but by Maintaining the real Principles of Religion, and stripping it of that adulterous Dress which hath been put on it, by the Wickedness of some, and the Weakness of others. He who gives his Assistance either Way, is so far promoting the Liberties, the Safety, and Welfare of his Country.

It is an excellent Passage of General *Wurts*, an Officer in the *Dutch* Troops, in the War 1672, quoted by *St. Euremond*, Vol. 4. *Amstel.* *When Men, says he, have oncc taken out of Christianity, what they have foisted into it, there will be but one Religion, as plain in its Doctrine, as pure in its Morals.*



A

General VIEW

O F

RELIGION.



HOEVER considers the Frame of his own Mind, and the most natural Dictates of his Reason, cannot but discern within himself a real and strong Tendency both to believe some certain Principles, and to ingage in some particular Actions, which have been denoted by one general Name, *viz.* that of Religion. Our Senses furnish us with subject Matter for Thought and Contemplation : An attentive Reflexion on our selves, our

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own Powers and Faculties, the several Beings we see around us, the Relations we bear to them, and they to us, will soon enable and oblige us to observe that there is a Difference in Actions. All Actions will not appear equally fit, beautiful and orderly. Those Actions which are suited to our Natures, and to the Reason and Proportion of Things, are good and virtuous. And whereas this Fitness which constitutes Virtue, results from the Consideration of the whole Frame of Things with which we are conversant, and approves it self to every reasoning Nature, it will naturally lead us to an Apprehension and Belief of a first intelligent Cause, who wisely and kindly constituted this Proportion and Order. And when this Idea is taken in, Virtue begins to deserve the Name of Religion. For Religion is properly a Temper and Conduct conform'd to the Order of Things, from a just Deference, and due Regard, to the Will and Authority of that Being who constituted that Order. This Regard to God appeared to the *Roman* Orator to be essential to Religion: Otherwise he would not have represented it as consisting in *the Fear of God, and a proper Care to*
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worship him *. And to such a *Belief*, and *Acknowledgment of God*, he elsewhere tells us, that *Nature*, by which he means the Reason of Mankind, or the natural Dictates of their Consciences, *leads all Men* †. These Things he thought to be of so great Importance, that he seems to apprehend, that *Fidelity amongst Mankind, human Society, and that most excellent Virtue, Justice could not be effectually supported without Piety towards the Gods* ‡. And indeed such hath been the deep Persuasion of the wisest and best of Men in all Ages and Nations, concerning the Reality and Importance of Religion, that there cannot be an Enquiry in which we are more nearly concerned, or, in which we ought to use greater Impartiality and Care than this, wherein the Nature of it consists, what are the Principles and genuine Maxims of it, and what are the proper Arguments to support and establish it.

* Religionem, eam quae in metu et caeremonia Deorum est, appellant. Cic. de Invent. l. 2. 22.

† Plerique (quod maxime verisimile est, et quo omnes duce natura vehimur) Deos esse dixerunt. Cic. de Nat. Deo. l. 1. 1.

‡ Atque haud scio an pietate versus Deos sublata, fides etiam, et societas humani generis, et una excellentissima virtus, Justitia tollatur. Ibid. 2.

The Subjects about which Religion is immediately concerned, are the Highest and Noblest that the Mind and Reason of Men can possibly be conversant with. As the Notion of a God implies in it absolute and every possible Perfection, such as Eternity, necessary Existence, Immensity, Self-sufficiency, absolute Independance, Self-consciousness, the most perfect Liberty, universal Knowledge, unbounded Power, infinite Goodness; and excludes the very Possibility of Alteration or Change; no Subject can challenge or deserve our Attention equally with this. No Subject can so effectually enlarge, exalt and dignify our reasonable Powers, or afford such genuine kindly Satisfaction to the diligent Enquirer. Especially if we consider this eternal, supreme and excellent Being, as the Creator of the World, as supporting all Things by his Power, as essentially present to every Object, and in every possible Part of Space; as repairing the Defects and supporting the Vigour of universal Nature; as over-ruling all Things by a wise steady and gracious Providence; as standing in the Relation of a Friend and Father to Men his Offspring

Offspring, as observing their Actions, pleas'd with, and assisting of their Virtues, displeas'd with, and an Enemy to their Vices, just in his Judgments, bountiful and impartial in his Rewards ; who in such a View must not feel and confess the vast Importance of the Subject, and make the Study of it the Business, Pleasure and Entertainment of his Life?

The wisest Men in all past Ages, those who have born the highest Offices in the largest and most flourishing Empires, who have been most Eminent and Remarkable for their Learning and Knowledge, who have had the most zealous Concern for the Welfare and Peace of Societies, have ever esteem'd Religion a Subject most worthy of their careful Consideration, and have made it the most delightful Employment of their retired and thoughtful Hours.

Far from implicitly rejecting the Belief of it, either in Favour of their Vices, or in Deference to the Judgment of Atheistical Philosophers, they have calmly and seriously enter'd into the Consideration of the Reason

Reason and Causes, and Relations of Things, and have thus traced out the Being of one Original all presiding Cause, and confessed the Obligations to Devotion and Piety. What need I mention the Names of *Socrates*, and *Plato*, *Cicero*, *Seneca*, *Plutarch*, and others? Their immortal Writings best speak their Sense of Things, and lead us into their genuine Sentiments. I shall only observe, that these are Men, who cannot be thought by-assed in Favour of Religion, by the Customs of their respective Countries; for they appear to have had but little Regard for, or rather a sovereign Contempt of that Religion which was national, and commonly professed in the Ages and Places in which they liv'd; while by the Force of Reason and the Conviction of the strongest Evidence, they were constrained to acknowledge and bear their Testimony, both to the Truth and Importance of real Religion.

One of the greatest Concerns of the present Life is, the Peace and Welfare of Societies. And therefore the Importance of Religion will be very much heightened, if it can be made appear to have a direct and im-

immediate Tendency to subserve and promote this very desirable End. I do not indeed apprehend, that it is a natural or just Way of Thinking or Speaking on this Subject, to make the Obligation to practise social Virtues absolutely to depend upon the Truth and Reality of Religion. This Obligation rather depends upon the Reasonableness of the Thing it self, and its absolute Necessity to the Peace and Welfare, nay to the very Being of a Society. Religion enjoins social Virtue, because of its benign Influence on social Happiness; and of Consequence, the Reasonableness and Obligation to social Virtue is Prior in its Nature to the Consideration of Religion, and would remain, while there are any Societies in the World, whether Religion be taken into Consideration or not. But though then the Obligation would be real, yet it would certainly be too weak to command any considerable Measure of Regard. Self would prove generally too strong a Principle of Conduct, and much over-balance our Concern for other Men, however reasonable it is to have such a Concern. A Man that has got quite rid of the Apprehension and Belief
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of a God, and Religion, will be very naturally and strongly inclined to make a God of himself. He will be his own End, and his own Rule : He will consider himself as accountable to none but himself, and therefore he will only design himself. When he sees it will stand with his own Interest and personal Safety, he will not scruple to invade another's Property, promote his own Advantage, and build his own Fortune on the Ruin of those about him. Reason, and the Peace and Happiness of the Community, would not prove Considerations forcible enough to curb every unruly Appetite, set Bounds to Ambition, or restrain from the Disorders these inordinate Passions are apt to occasion. A Nation of Atheists would express little Regard to Honour, Justice, and Truth, but would be likely to prove an Herd of Savages, ranging and ravaging, seeking their Prey, and plundering and destroying their weaker Neighbours ; treacherous and faithless Creatures, without mutual Love, or mutual Confidence.

It surely can admit of no Doubt, that the Belief of a God, the Observer and Judge of Mens Actions, the Rewarder of their Virtue,

tue, and the Avenger of their Crimes, is the noblest and strongest Motive to Justice and Charity, and every social Virtue; and the most powerful Restraint that can be imagined on the irregular Passions and vicious Affections of Mankind. This oftentimes proves an Awe and a Check, when it is highly probable the Fears of human Punishment would prove ineffectual. And because this Belief of a Deity is universally rooted and fixed in the Mind, and is, beyond all other Considerations, suited to strike every reasonable Creature with an awful Concern; therefore an Appeal to him is, by all civilized Nations, esteem'd as the great Cement and Security of Society, and is made Use of by them as the dernier Resort in deciding the most important Controversies. And it is scarce possible in the Nature of Things, that a Person firmly convinc'd of the Being of a God, and who worships him in that excellent Manner which *Cicero* recommends, *Semper pura, integra, incorrupta et mente* *; or, in the Words of a much greater Person, *In Spirit and Truth*, should not prove the very best

* Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2. 28.

Member of Society, and conduct all his Actions to the publick Good. And if notwithstanding the general professed Belief of Religion, and the Punishment which that leads us to apprehend will be inflicted on all wicked Disturbers of the publick Peace, yet the vicious Passions of Mankind are scarce kept under any tolerable Restraints, how much more dreadful would the Effects be, if once the Notions of God and Religion were entirely banished out of their Minds; and what else could be the natural Consequence, but *Perturbatio Vitae et magna Confusio* †, universal Misery, and absolute Confusion?

Besides, as the Belief of the first Principles of Religion, *viz.* That there is a God, the Observer and Judge of human Actions, necessarily infers, and naturally leads to the Acknowledgment of a future State of Rewards and Punishments, because there appear no discriminating Distributions of Good and Evil in the present; hence the Importance of Religion still grows higher, and increases in Proportion to our Views and Prospects into Futurity.

† Cic. de Nat. Deo. l. 1. 2.

For when Men consider themselves, not only as Members of civil Society, and as accountable to human Laws, but likewise as the Subjects of God himself, and as such designed for a future World, and there accountable to the supreme Being for their Actions in this World; they must necessarily think it to be of the utmost Consequence to them, to form just Notions of the Perfections of his Nature, and to pay him an acceptable Worship and Service, their future State being to be determined by it; that is, they must esteem Religion to be a Matter of the highest Importance in itself, and that it deserves to be their first and principal Concern. And it must be highly indecent, and upon no Principles justifiable, for any Man to treat a Subject of this great Moment with Ridicule, Contempt, or Scorn.

It is true, there have been some in all Ages, who have pretended to question or deny all the Principles of Religion, and have represented them as chimerical and false; few indeed, in Comparison, and those not eminent or remarkable for their Integrity,

Virtue, or Learning. Some of the ancient Philosophers doubted of the very Being of a God, as *Protagoras*, and his Disciples: Others expressly denied his Existence, as *Diagoras*, and one or two more. Some pretended to acknowledge a superior divine Nature; but denied any superintending particular Providence over human Affairs, as *Epicurus* and his Followers. The Principles of others, as well as of our modern Unbelievers, seem to centre in meer Matter, and an uncontrollable Fatality, by which they deny the Being of a God, the Difference of Actions, and subvert all Obligations to Piety and Virtue.

But all the different Hypotheses of Atheism will appear to every impartial Enquirer to be so many Schemes of gross Absurdity, and perpetual Blunder; without any Foundation in Nature and Reason to support them, without any Truth, and with but little of the Face or Shadow of Truth; like the wild, incoherent Dreams of a disturbed Imagination; properly enthusiastick and whimsical. There is so little in the Nature of Things that can have any Tendency to countenance or lead Men into any of the Schemes of Atheism or Irreligion, that it is a very difficult

cult Matter to forbear judging, that they are all formed and given into, meerly as the most plausible likely Methods that can be devised, to get rid of Checks, Remorse, and Forebodings; and to make Licentiousness, and an unrestrained Gratification of Appetite and Passion, sit a little more easy upon the Mind. But there is no need to raise Prejudices against those Principles, by representing the Character and Conduct, the Views and Designs of those who espouse and endeavour to propagate them. They will be effectually overturned, and sufficiently exposed, by shewing that Religion stands strongly built on the Foundations of Reason and Truth.

Thus much must be, and is indeed I think universally, allowed in Favour of Religion, that there must have been something really and strictly eternal, without any Beginning of Existence, and therefore absolutely Necessary: A Principle, as capable of strict Demonstration as any Mathematical Proposition whatever: And the Consequence from hence necessarily is, that all the Properties and Attributes of this eternal Being, must be inseparable from his Nature; or, that to suppose
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him destitute of any of those Properties he eternally had is as real a Contradiction, as to suppose that this eternal Being once was not. Consequently, if the System of Matter is this eternal Being, it must ever have been living, conscious, and active; *i. e.* Life, Consciousness, and the Power of Action must be essential Properties of Matter, and it must be a real Contradiction to suppose the System of Matter destitute of these Properties; for to suppose any Being strictly eternal and absolutely necessary, and yet to be subject to the Loss of its Properties is a downright Absurdity. But that Life, Consciousness, and the Power of Action are not essential to Matter, or that it is no Contradiction to suppose Matter to exist without them, is evident, in that many Systems of Matter actually have them not; and of Consequence, if any Parts of Matter are without them, it is no Contradiction to suppose, that every Part, or the whole System of Matter may be without them also. For that which is essential to Matter must universally and equally belong to every Part of it; and if Life, Consciousness, and Liberty do essentially belong to it, it must be as great an Absurdity to say of
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any Part of Matter, that it is unactive, unconscious, and destitute of the Power of Action, as it would be to say, that it is not extended, divisible, and the like. Every Man that lives is conscious to his own Life, Perception and Power of Action; and of Consequence, they must belong to some Being, they must be inseparable Properties of some Nature or Substance, as really, and truly as Extension, Figure, Divisibility, and the like, are essential Attributes of some real Being or Substance; and as they are not essential to Matter, they must necessarily belong to some other Nature, *i. e.* a Nature, or Being spiritual and immaterial. So that the eternal Being is immaterial, living, conscious, and active; and as Matter is not eternal and necessary, it must either have fallen into Being by chance, or be the Production of the eternal immaterial Being. To affirm that it came into Being by chance, is to say, that there has been an Effect without a Cause, which is absurd; and therefore it must have been a Production of the necessary spiritual Substance; and as it must have been created, it must be dependent; and as it has no inward Principle of Consciousness or Power of Action, it must be
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under the constant Direction and Government of him that made it. Hereby the two great and leading Principles of Religion, the Being of a God, and his universal Providence are solidly established: And from hence all the Duties of Piety flow by unavoidable and necessary Consequence.

The very Notion of an absolutely necessary, eternal Being, includes in it the Notion of absolute and infinite Perfection. For if any Being necessarily exists, it must be impossible for him not to exist; if it be impossible for him not to exist, the only Reason that can be assign'd for it, is, because such a Being can have no possible Defect, that is, in other Words, must be possessed of absolute infinite Perfection. This Idea of God naturally raises a pleasing Admiration, and the first Degrees of Satisfaction and Pleasure. And when this glorious and excellent Being is farther considered, as interested in all the Affairs of the World, and as the Creator, Father, and Governour of Men, all the other Duties of Piety and Religion immediately appear highly reasonable. The Gift of Being, evidently shows us that we are dependent,

ent, and naturally leads us to suitable Acknowledgments, and proper Expressions of our Sense of this Dependence. The Necessaries and Conveniencies of Life, and all the other Instances of Favour and Mercy which we receive, demand the cheerful return of the highest Gratitude and warmest Love. The Characters of God, as our Governour and Father, and a watchful Observer of all our Actions, are suited to strike every attentive Mind with Reverence and Fear; his universal Providence makes it very fit and reasonable, that we should frequently recommend our selves and our Fellow-Creatures, the Universe, with all the various Orders of Beings which he has placed therein, to his wise and kind Care; and that we should, with Thanksgiving and Praise, acknowledge the several Displays which he makes of his infinite Perfections in his Conduct towards the several Works of his Hands. His Power, Wisdom, Goodness, and experienced Faithfulness give us all the Encouragement that can be desir'd, firmly to rely on his Promises, and assure us, that none of the Expectations which he has rais'd in any of his Creatures, shall be disappointed. The same Perfections

plainly teach us, that it must be both our Duty and our Wisdom, with Patience and Resignation, to submit to all his Disposals; and to exercise the firmest Trust and Confidence in his Ability and Readiness, to take the wisest, the kindest, and most effectual Care of us, during the whole Course of our Existence.

From the same Principles, if we duly attend to them, we shall clearly discern ourselves under strong Obligations to every Instance of Self-Government, and to a steady Regard to Justice and Goodness in our whole Temper and Conduct towards our Fellow-Creatures. Hence we easily and naturally gather, that it concerns us to be just and righteous to all with whom we have to do. All Nations of Men that dwell on the Face of the Earth, are made by the same Hand, and of the same Materials. The first and supreme Intelligence has made them all of one Blood. They are all to be consider'd as the Workmanship of his Hands, and the Objects of his Care. And by the Situation in which he has placed them, he has given to each of them particular Rights, which
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other Men ought by no Means to infringe and violate, unless they are forfeited. Every Man has a Right given him by his Maker, during his Pleasure, to his Life, his Health, his Ease, his Limbs, his Liberty, his honestly acquired Property, and to a Credit and Reputation among his Neighbours, proportioned to the Wisdom and Regularity of his Conduct; and whoever, by Fraud or Violence, disturbs another in the Possession of any of these valuable Enjoyments, does not only injure and hurt the Person aggrieved, but acts likewise in manifest Contradiction to the Will and Pleasure of our common supreme Governour. From whose Nature, Perfections, and Conduct towards all the Works of his Hands, we may most distinctly and assuredly know, that it is his Mind and Will, that we should deal with every Man just in the same Manner, in which we, in like Circumstances, should reasonably desire he would deal with us.

But this Equity and Justice is but a Part of the Debt which we may perceive ourselves to owe, in our present Circumstances, to all Mankind. We are so formed and con-

stituted, that we stand in need of Assistance from one another, in Order to make our present Situation tolerably easy and comfortable to any of us. We all of us want and desire the good Will of those about us. There are Benefits and Advantages which we are capable of relishing and enjoying, which we cannot attain without the benevolent and friendly Aids of Men like ourselves. And therefore we readily conclude, that in such Cases we are intitled to their Assistance; and that it is fit and reasonable, and their Duty, to express a Concern for our Welfare. And the Inference is as strong and just, tho', perhaps, not quite so readily made, that therefore we are obliged to love, wish well to, and help other Men. The Goodness of God is conspicuous in the constant Course of his providential Despensations. He is good to all, does not only bear with, but he discovers Kindness and good Will even to the most Unthankful and Undeserving. An Example well worthy of Imitation, and which, it may reasonably be expected, should effectually influence all the Sharers in this unlimited Bounty, to the most sincere mutual Affection

Affections and the most extensive Benevolence and Love to one another.

And the same Principles will lead us to see, how expedient and necessary it is that we should keep a constant Guard upon ourselves, and continually Exercise ourselves in every Instance of Self-Government. We are by these Principles forced to observe and acknowledge the Obligation we are under, to take a proper Care of ourselves, of both Parts of ourselves, our Bodies and our Spirits. We are not the Authors of our Beings, and therefore we are not at Liberty to despoise of them and use them altogether at our own Pleasure. God is the Former of our Bodies, the Father of our Spirits; and we shall but ill express our Sense of his Favour in calling us into Existence, and assigning us such a Rank as we bear in his Creation, by an utter Neglect and Unconcernedness about either the material or immaterial Substances of which we consist. It is evidently our Duty to preserve our Bodies in Health, and our Spirits with all their Powers in vigour, as well and as long as we can. We have no right to contemn, much less to shorten, our Lives. We must be

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Content to abide in, and endeavour chearfully and diligently to attend the several Stations and Posts of Service and Usefulness which he has assign'd us. If it be our Duty to please God, and to act justly and kindly by our Neighbours, it is both our Duty and our Wisdom to endeavour always to preserve such a Temper of Body and such a Disposition of Mind, as will best fit and enable us to act as we ought both towards God and towards Man: That is, in other Words, it must be both our indispensable Duty and our highest Wisdom, to be temperate in all Things, to bridle and Restrain our Appetites, to govern our Passions, and to bring all our lower Powers into an habitual Subjection to the cool and calm Voice of Reason. Every Man is obliged to see to it, that the Power in which he most nearly resembles his Maker, the Standard of all Perfection, does stately bear Sway in his Mind. Without this, he can never be effectually secured from the grossest Enormities; with it, he will have a prevailing Propensity and Readiness to every good Work.

These are the principal and primary Duties of Religion, Piety towards God, Justice
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and Goodness in our Transactions with Men, Temperance and Patience, Diligence and Contentment in our respective Stations and Circumstances in Life. And these are all demonstrably founded in Truth, and result from the Reason and Nature of Things, and consequently, Religion must be a Matter of the highest Importance, even if the Benefits and Advantages attending the Practice of it were more uncertain in their Nature, lower in their Kind, and fewer in their Number, than, upon Enquiry and Search, they will be found to be.

But altho' Virtue be its own sufficient Recompence, yet our wise and kind Creator and Governour, in Consideration of our Frame and Circumstances, has constituted the Nature and Relations of Things in such a Manner, as that great and singular Advantages should attend an upright Regard to the Dictates of Religion; and that Misery, Uneasiness, and Distress, should naturally arise from a criminal Neglect of them. This natural Tendency of Virtue and Vice, Religion and Irreligion, lies very obvious, and is abundantly confirmed by every Day's
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Experience. The attentive Mind cannot fail of discerning it. But there are Men of an indolent, thoughtless Disposition; and others immersed either in the Pleasures or Hurries of Life, who need to have this important Truth frequently held up to them, and set before them in every Light. It is an Instance therefore of that Benevolence, which we have seen to be no inconsiderable Branch of Religion, to take all proper Opportunities to observe, and inculcate on the Minds of Men, that every individual reasonable Creature, by an uniform and steady Regard to Virtue and Religion, most effectually secures and advances his own Interest and Happiness, and promotes, as far as in him lies, the Comfort, Peace, and Welfare of all to whom he stands any Way related in Society.

Every Virtue is productive of some Kind, some Degree, of Happiness to the Person who loves and practises it. Temperance, Sobriety, and Chastity naturally tend to confirm Health, prolong Life, and preserve the Strength and Vigour of our several Faculties. Diligence in our respective Employments, is the surest, if not the speediest Method of increasing

creasing our Substance, and procuring a desirable Measure of the Necessaries and Conveniencies of Life : And Contentment will enable us to enjoy what we have, with the greatest Tranquillity and Cheerfulness. Universal Justice will secure us from the ill Will of those about us ; by the Practice of it, we shall give no just Offense, or Occasion of Resentment to any Man. Extensive Goodness will intitle us to reciprocal Affection from those whom we oblige ; and procure us the Applause and kind Wishes of all who observe our Conduct. An habitual Regard to God, and a Consciousness that we desire in every proper Manner to express that Regard, will give us a reasonable Expectation and Assurance of his continual Favour, Assistance and Acceptance. And this will not only add to our Satisfaction in the Enjoyment of every Instance of his Goodness that we are indulged with ; but it will, above all other Considerations, sweeten the Toils, and lighten the Burthens of Life, and enable us to bear our several Troubles with Calmness, and meet even Death itself with a becoming and desirable Fortitude.

On the other Side ; View the Man whose Disposition and Behaviour is just the Reverse, who has no Fear of God before his Eyes, no Regard to the Rights and Happiness of his Fellow Creatures, who is injurious and cruel in his Temper and Conduct, who gives the Reins to his Appetites and Passions, and suffers himself to be hurried by them into all Manner of Violence, Sensuality and Excess : See his Constitution broke, half his Days cut off, the Powers of his Mind weaken'd, his Substance wasted, his Reputation blasted, despised and insulted by those whom he has neglected or injured, and from what Quarter has such a Creature the least Shadow of Reason to expect Pity, Comfort, or Relief ? God and all Nature seem armed against him, at a Time when he needs no other Enemy, and can hardly have any more terrible Enemy than himself. The conscious Principle within him, which has been so much disregarded and misused, now takes ample Revenge ; and the Uneasiness and Pain, occasion'd by Self-Reflection, will grow greater than he can bear. While the same Principle is as righteous and bountiful in its Rewards,

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where it has been attended to, and decently regarded. For nothing will, or can, give the Mind of a Man so true a Pleasure, so high and solid a Satisfaction, as a Consciousness, that he has done the greatest Good he was capable of; that he has answer'd the End of his Creation, that he has endeavoured to imitate the Perfections of his Maker, and that he has, as far as he was able, complied with the main and principal Obligations of his Nature.

Thus stands every Man's personal Happiness affected, in a Way of natural Consequence, by the greater or less Regard which he expresses to the Dictates of Reason and Religion. Nor is social Happiness less visibly or sensibly affected by a Regard or Disregard to the same Rules.

If every Man were governed by the Reason of Things, by Equity and Fitness in every Part of his Conduct, what a Paradise would this World be? What would be wanting, but Eternity, and growing Degrees of the same Excellence to make it Heaven? There would then be no Tyrants invading

the Liberties of the People; nor any Rebels, on the other Hand, rising up against their Princes. *Honour* would always be given to *whom Honour would be* so justly due; and *Tribute* without Murmuring, to *whom Tribute*. There would be no abuse of Power nor of Liberty. The Throne would be established in the same Righteousness, that would effectually unite every Hand in its Support; nay, there would be no right Hand of Falshood, or of Violence. Such Principles would inspire Men in Power with generous Designs for the Good of Mankind; they would account it their Glory to represent the most High in his Goodness and Beneficence, as well as in his Majesty and Grandeur; and would never affect or value themselves on any Degree of the latter Resemblance, without a proportionable Measure of the former. There would, in such a State of Things, be no separate, private Interests to be advanced at the Hazard, much less on the foreseen Ruins of the publick Welfare. The People would be esteemed as Children in the large Family, and the Princes without Flattery would be saluted *Patres Patriae* in the Style of the *Romans*, or in the well known

known Language of a Prophet, *Kings shall be Nursing Fathers, and Queens shall be Nursing Mothers.* Nothing makes a Crown fit faster or shine brighter. Nothing makes Majesty more like the Image and Ordinance of God. Guards and other such Ensigns of Power may make Princes feared; it is Virtue and Religion alone that can make them universally beloved while they live, that can make their Memories precious, and constrain all Posterity to call them Blessed.

This secures the Obedience of the People from Principle. A Subjection that does not proceed only from Fear, but which is yielded cheerfully *for Conscience sake.* That Conscience which Nothing can deter from obeying God rather than Man, is the firmest Security for a steady Loyalty. He that is careful to render unto God the Things that are God's, will never fail to give unto *Cæsar* all the Things which Reason and Religion teach him to regard as due unto *Cæsar*.

Suppose, for a Moment, that a religious Temper and Life were as universally prevalent as they ought to be: Suppose, that the
 due

due Reverence of God, attended with every proper Expression of Homage, that Regard to Men which their mutual Relations and the Divine Order requires ; suppose, That Humility, Meekness and Condescension, Forbearance and Love, Temperance and Chastity, Truth, Justice, and Charity were every where and in every one ; what an Idea, what a pleasing Scene does this present ? What a World would this be ? What Tranquility, Harmony, and Peace ? What Security and Pleasure ? The Images of the golden Age interspers'd through the Works of the Heathen Poets are faint Representations of the Happiness and Glory of such a State of Things. The Descriptions of it given by the ancient *Jewish* Prophet, seem much more lively and striking. “ The Fruits of Righteousness are
 “ Peace, Quietness, and Assurance for ever.
 “ Drop down ye Heavens from above, and
 “ let the Skies pour down Righteousness, let the
 “ Earth open, and bring forth Salvation ; let
 “ Righteousness spring up together, I, the
 “ Lord, have created it. Then shall the Wolf
 “ dwell with the Lamb, and the Leopard lie
 “ down with the Kid, and a little Child shall
 “ lead them ; --- and the sucking Child shall
 “ play

“ play on the Hole of the Asp, and the weaned
 “ Child shall put his Hand on the Cockatrice
 “ Den ; they shall not hurt nor destroy in
 “ all my holy Mountain ; for the Earth shall
 “ be full of the Knowledge of God, as the
 “ Waters cover the Seas.”

Men will live then safely and quietly by
 one another : Honour and Property will be
 then secure on every Side : No Danger will
 threaten the one or the other from any Quar-
 ter : Publick Spirit will no longer be looked
 upon as a *Chimaera*, and the Pretense to it
 turn'd into Ridicule. It will then be seen
 and acknowledg'd, that there may be such a
 Thing as a generous passionate Concern for
 the general Good, distinct from a selfish
 Regard to particular Advantage.

I turn to thee, O Libertine, and ask, Art
 thou a Mourner at the Absence of Pride and
 Passion, Lewdness and Drunkenness ? Do'st
 thou bewail the Banishment of Lust and
 Falshood, of Revenge, Ill-Nature and Cruel-
 ty with all their goodly Train ? And would'st
 thou have them recalled into a righteous
 World, lest there should not be *private Vices*
 enough for the *publick Benefit* ? To

To be serious. It will be hard for any Man to bring himself to believe, or prove to others, that Covetousness, Idleness, Luxury, Fraud and Perjury, are proper and promising Means of advancing the Happiness of the Community. Covetousness leads Men to bury their Talents, and naturally produces a Stagnation of the publick Blood. Idleness does not only cloth the lazy Creature himself with Rags, but it robs the Publick likewise of all the Benefit that would accrue from his Diligence. Extravagance and Luxury ruin Families as surely, if not so quickly, as Fire and Sword; and naturally and necessarily fill a Nation with Beggary, Thievery, and Fraud. Lying and profane Swearing lead to Perjury, and tend to destroy Credit, and to dissolve the common Bond of Society, and strike at the Foundation of all Religion, as it is an appeal to God turned into a Defiance of him; and what Hold can there be on a Person who is loose to all the Obligations of Conscience and Truth? But instead of demonstrating the malign Tendency, and mischievous Consequences of a Want of Religion in a Society, through all the Circle of Vices,

let

let me be allowed to repeat an Observation which has been frequently and justly made, and stands good to this Day; *viz.* " That
 " the greatest Empires, and the most flourishing Nations have risen and fallen with
 " their Virtue, and their Depravation and
 " Destruction are dated together."

But it perhaps may be, and indeed has been, made a Question, whether Religion, with all these Advantages which it so speciously promises, be consistent with the Liberties of Mankind. Religion may be thought, and has been represented to lay improper Restraints upon Men, rigorously and needlessly to check and curb the Appetites and Passions that are natural to us, and wove into our Frame and Make; it has been represented as enslaving our Judgments, depriving Men of the free Exercise of their Powers, and Faculties, and abridging, and bearing hard upon their Civil Rights. And if these Charges could be fastened on Religion, it might well create a Doubt and Jealousy in the Mind, whether Religion be that reasonable Thing which its Friends and Votaries contend that it is.

But Religion may be fairly, and without much Difficulty, cleared of all these Imputations. It must be granted, that it does indeed lay some Restraints on the Passions and Appetites of Mankind: But by no means can it be justly said to lay any unfriendly or improper Restraints. It does not put Men into an unnatural State, by requiring them to bring their Appetites and Passions into subjection to the Dictates of Nature. For Appetites and Passions are in themselves inferior, and therefore should be under the Regulation and Conduct of Reason. If they are allowed to govern that Power which they ought to obey, it is impossible to preserve the true natural Freedom of the humane Mind: Which properly consists in a ready delightful Practice of every Thing that is fit and right, and an easy pleasant Abstinence from every Thing unworthy of our Natures, and inconsistent with our true and highest Happiness.

If we could suppose the whole World set free from all such Restraints of Appetite and Passion, as the Libertine complains of, what would be the Consequence to the Whole, or even

even to any Individual? Would not every Man's Life and Property, and Honour, the licentious Man's own not excepted, be exposed to the same general Ravage and Plunder? If he says, he had rather stand to the most desolating and melancholy Consequences of universal Licence, than suffer any restraint; this only shews the Strength of the poor Wretch's Appetites and Passions. It is plain, the Man is a Slave, and in vassalage to divers Lusts and Pleasures. He has got loose indeed from the Law of his Mind; he is not in subjection to his Reason. But can he fancy himself therefore the more at Liberty? He has got a much more arbitrary and tyrannical Lord and Master. The Law in his Members says to him, go, and he goes, come, and he comes, do this, and he straitway does it. And this he calls being at perfect Liberty, because he finds himself pleased with executing these unreasonable Commands and Orders. Whereas, alas, it is no unusual thing for a Man that has lost the Use of his Reason, greatly to delight himself with his Prison, and his Fetters. Envy, Cruelty, Covetousness, Malice, Pride, Jealousy, and Revenge, have their constraining Power, and issue out

their several Orders, and however loud Boasts those who are employed in executing those Orders may make of the Liberty and Freedom they enjoy above their Neighbours, every reasonable and considerate Man will look upon their Condition with Pity rather than with Envy. Reason and Religion make large Allowances for our natural Inclinations. They do not require us to extirpate, but only to govern them. The Restraints laid upon them are only with respect to some particular Objects and Degrees, and in such Circumstances, as the Libertine himself would be glad to have some Restraints laid, when he himself is likely to suffer, either in his Property, Honour, or Peace, by the unrestrained Indulgence of them. Reason and Religion would bear a constant and universal Sway in the World, if no Man would break their Bands, and cast their Cords far from him, 'till he had found a better and a kinder Master; or 'till he could determine upon a Way to secure himself, his own dear self, from the calamitous Consequences of universal Licentiousness.

And

And yet, if such a Way could be supposed possible to be found out, what an Idea must we have of a Man, and how unworthy must all his Fellow-Creatures judge him to be of the Benefit of reasonable Laws, who would make them all a Sacrifice to his own favourite Inclinations? This is far beyond *Nero*, this is setting an whole World on fire, while he makes a little Musick to himself.

Thus it appears, that no true, valuable, natural Liberty can be said to be restrained or abridged by Religion. Nor will it be found, to make or justify any Incroachments on Men's Liberty of Judgment, or their civil Rights. As Religion is founded in Truth, it can deny no Man the free Exercise of his Thoughts and Judgment, and does not desire that any Man should so much as profess an Attachment or Regard to it, which is not the Effect of Evidence and Conviction. This Sort of Liberty can never be prejudiced by true Religion, for there can be no true Religion without it. Religion hath, it must be confessed, been made too often a Pretense for depriving particular Persons of their Right

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to judge for themselves, and other Advantages, to which they had a just Claim in common with the Rest of their Fellow-Subjects. The Many have frequently made use of the Name of Religion, to discountenance and oppress the Minority of a Society. But how much Mischief soever of this Kind has been done under the Name of Religion, the Thing it self stands clear of all Guilt in this Respect: For it plainly and loudly disclaims, and condemns all such Practices as these. Superstition, Bigotry, worldly Interest, Spleen, Ambition, Lust of Power have prompted Men to oppress their quiet and inoffensive Neighbours, and to lay them under negative Discouragements, and positive Penalties, for private Judgment and Matters of Conscience. These have often consecrated Rebellion, Perjury, Murder, and Robbery, with the Name of Religion; they have put out Religion's Colours, while they have been pyratically making Prizes on its Votaries. The Druid, the Braman, the Rabbi, the Mufti, the Dervise, the Priests of every Religion and of every Denomination, the conforming and dissenting Bigots have all frequently had their Share in these scandalous Pretences and Practices.

ces. Religion never. Religion cannot possibly by any of these Methods fight against and destroy itself. What! out of Veneration for the Deity, hurt any intelligent Creature, who out of Veneration of the same Deity had rather suffer than offend him. There cannot be a more flagrant Absurdity, or more manifest Contradiction. The genuin Love and Fear of God will always inspire Men with other Sentiments, and teach them Forbearance, Patience, Condescension, Charity and Love; and as Men never act more contrary to the Nature and Principles of Religion, so they never so much obscure the Beauty and debase the Majesty of it, as when they make it the Pretense for persecuting others, and depriving them of their Rights as Men, and their Privileges as Members of civil Society. Religion can never point out any Way of giving Glory to God, which is inconsistent with the most sincere Affection, and extensive good Will to Mankind.

Now when this is the excellent Nature, and this the salutary, and beneficial Tendency of Religion, it seems natural that all Creatures who are form'd capable of Religion, should be always making diligent Inquiries, feeling
after

after, expressing earnest Desires, and suitable Endeavours after a clear and distinct Knowledge of all its Dictates, and a full Acquaintance with every Thing that relates to so important a Subject. It is highly agreeable to the rightest Notions which we form of the Nature of God, and of our own Nature, that there should be such a Tendency of our Spirits to the Father of Spirits, and that we should be looking and waiting for all those Instructions and Assistances, which, in his own Time and Way, he may see it Necessary and Expedient for the Welfare of his Offspring to communicate and afford to them.

I am very well apprized, that there are many who think and assert, that God has sufficiently provided for the Direction and Succour of Mankind, by making them reasonable Creatures. By giving them the Use of Reason, he has made them capable of discerning every Thing, that it is of Importance for them to know, in order to their being Religious and Happy. Men need no other Discoveries of the Nature, Perfections, and Will of God than what they may attain by the due Use of their Reason. For by our Reason, say they, we acquaint our selves with the Being and Attributes

bures of God ; and are led to Adoration, and Obedience, both Active and Passive. And God, in giving us our reasonable Powers, and preserving the Exercise of them, and furnishing us with Objects proper to convey a Sense of his Excellencies, who is the Creator and Governour of all Things ; God, in doing these Things, is ever presenting himself to us in the most instructive and beneficial Manner, and bestowing upon us every Thing that is necessary to our Happiness. And if we are not wanting to ourselves, by a Neglect or Misuse of our Reason, there is nothing wanting from God in a supernatural Way, in any other Way additional to Reason, to make us Wise and Happy.

But this Way of stating Things does by no Means answer the Exigencies of Mankind ; nor provide for the Happiness of any Man, that is born into the World under its present Disorders. For humane Nature and Reason we see every where vitiated and corrupted. How it came to be so, doth not belong to this Place to inquire. But the Fact is Evident beyond all Dispute. Infomuch, that all the Reason with which we are naturally endued, and all the Advantages that we have, from the Volumes of

Nature and Providence being opened to us; and I will add further, that notwithstanding all the traditional Helps we have, in the Conveyance of the most important Truths from Parents to Children, from one Generation to another; and once more, notwithstanding great and considerable Genius's, that God has sometimes raised up, to improve all the Powers and Principles of Reason, for the Benefit and Advantage of those who had not Capacity or Leisure to make those Improvements for themselves; yet no Man is able, with all these Helps, to make such an Use of his own Reason, as to be secured from dangerous Mistakes, and from the Vices and Corruptions of the World; but will find it still necessary to call for farther Assistance in Cases of Doubt and Difficulty, and in Times of Disorder and Distress.

There can be no Doubt of the Possibility of God's revealing to Men any important Truth, or Rule of Duty, with which he would have them to be acquainted, if we consider the absolute Power that he hath over all the Works of his Hands, and the perfect Knowledge that he has of our Capacities and Circumstances, and of all the Methods, by
which

which we are capable of receiving Impressions and Informations. He can so dispose Things material, as to impress our Senses and Imaginations by Voices, or Visions, or Dreams, in what Manner and to what Degree he pleases. And he has such an immediate Access to our Minds and Spirits, that he can implant any Notion he sees fit ; and he can give it such Measures of Weight and Importance as shall keep our Thoughts attentive to it, 'till the Ends he proposes to serve are fully attained by it. And he can give the Mind such Evidence and Assurance of these Impressions being from himself, that Reason shall justify all the Regard which is paid to them. He can also enable such a Mind to give rational Proof and Satisfaction to others, that the Things thus discovered and impress'd are truly and really from God. And if these Things be allow'd, as I think none of them can be denied on a thorough Consideration of the Divine Nature and our own, there needs no more to prove the Possibility of a Revelation, whenever the Honour of God, or the Necessities of Men make it requisite.

Nor does it seem at all improbable, that what is thus possible to be done, should be effected in the Course of the Divine Government. The Securing the Ends of that Government seems to require it. The main Ends of God's governing the World are these; to display the Perfections of the Creator; to maintain the Order of Things throughout the Creation; to prevent, or limit, or provide against the Workings of Evil, with its Attendants, Misery and Death; and to promote the Happiness of each Rank of Beings, according to their Nature and Capacities.

Nothing can have a plainer Tendency to display the Divine Perfections than a Revelation. Suppose the Reason of Man in its most clear and uncorrupted Estate, doubtless, it would be capable of great and endless Additions to its Knowledge of the Divine Perfections: And tho' God might determine, in his Settlement of Things, to make this Knowledge gradual and progressive, according to Man's Use of those reasonable Powers with which he is indow'd, yet sometimes, as a Reward to Goodness and Diligence, he might impart

impart more immediately, and certainly, those Notices of his Wisdom, Holiness, and Goodness, that should make him doubly Glorious to a Mind, whose highest Satisfaction is the honouring and pleasing its Maker. And it is by no Means, unlikely, that while Reason is searching after God, and rejoicing in the beholding the Impress of his Perfections upon the Works of his Hands, and celebrating and adoring these Perfections in the best Manner it can, the Creator, seeing the Imperfections and Mistakes of a Spirit dwelling in Flesh, should draw it to still closer Views of spiritual Things, and open the Scenes of Truth to it, one after another, by more special Discoveries of himself. Thus Reason will represent it as highly probable, that its Labours, and Faithfulness, and Humility, in seeking the Knowledge and Glory of God, should be assisted and rewarded by farther Revelations. Thus the Governour of the World might shew those Lines of Wisdom, Power, Rectitude, and Goodness, which Reason could not have discovered without superiour Help to point them out; and in the Discovery of which there is a much brighter and fuller Display of those infinite

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Perfections. This is not an unreasonable Way of Thinking, when we speak of the Reason of Man as in its best Estate.

But if we consider it, as very much lost to the Knowledge of God, and taken up with Things sensible, almost wholly imploied in catering for the Body, insomuch, that the great Creator is little thought of, or basely misrepresented in his own World; it does not seem likely, that in such Circumstances the World should be continued, and he continue Governour in it, without making some fresh and farther Displays of his Perfections. If we can suppose him giving up this End of his Government, which is the first and greatest End of all, we may as well say, that he Exercises no Government at all; and that he has as little Value for Wisdom, Justice, Goodness, Truth, and Faithfulness, as Men themselves can have. Which in other Words is to say, that the only Things in which an infinite Mind could Delight and Glory from all Eternity, he is content to have despised and made Nothing of, in one Part of that World where he has formed Creatures fit to shew forth his Praise, but which he is
forced

forced to look upon with utter Disappointment. This Representation of God, is so unworthy of him, and destructive of his very Nature, that Nothing in the World can have a stronger Probability, than the making some new and fuller Discovery of the Divine Perfections, than could be done by humane Reason.

For without this, thinking and free Agents would never be kept in any Order. Take away the Sense of a Deity, and of that Wisdom, Justice, Goodness, and Truth which he is resolved to maintain; and then every Passion and Humour, every bodily Pleasure, or secular Interest would unavoidably prevail, to confound the Order of Things, and to break in upon all the Relations and harmonious Dispositions of them. To suppose the wise and good Governour of the World a meer Spectator of the Havock that is made by the utter Contempt of Wisdom, Goodness, &c. and not to make such fresh Discovery of these Perfections, as to put some Stop, and prescribe some Bounds to these Confusions, is to make his Government, in this View of it, good for Nothing;

Nothing; and it is better to be absolutely denied, than thus dishonoured.

If it should here be asked, why did God make Things so, as that they should be liable to such Disorder and Confusion, and why did he leave it in the Power of any thinking Agent to disgrace his Workmanship and Perfections? I answer, if it became the Perfection of God to make Creatures with various Degrees of Imperfection, and yet to make every intelligent Agent in some Measure free, it is then no Way unbecoming the infinite Mind, to permit such a Creature to shew its own Choice, and to allow those Things, which are put in subjection to him, to be used according to that Choice. But then it is the most probable and reasonable Thing in the World to suppose, that it is one Part of the Scheme of the divine Government, that he will reserve to himself a Right and Power to interpose, whenever he sees the Disorders so great, as to confound and break in upon the general Settlement, and Harmony of Things.

This leads me to the next great End of Government, that argues the Probability of a
Divine

Divine Revelation; viz. the preventing, limiting, and providing against the Working of *Evil*, with its Attendants, *Misery* and *Death*. When we speak of God, we mean a Being perfectly good, to whom Evil is most opposite and hateful. Whether this be an eternal Principle, or from some created Cause, and so arising from the Imperfection and Corruption of Things, and the perverse malignant Dispositions of some thinking Agents, there is no need here to determine. Let that be as it will, we cannot suppose a Governour of this World, who is perfectly holy and good, but we must make it one main View of his Government to counterwork *Evil*, and to provide Remedies against it. Therefore when Evil prevails so far, as to cover the Minds of Men with Darkness, and to bring them into Scenes of Misery and Death, it is the most reasonable Thing that can be, for infinite Wisdom and Goodness to shine in upon them with some new Light, and Discoveries of Salvation, and to shew them a Way to get out of those Miseries and Dangers into which they are fallen. By thus limiting and destroying the Power of Evil, a Creature is led to Glory afresh in the Display of the Perfection

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of its Maker, who breaks for him the Chains of Darkneſs, and all the Bonds of Death. Let any Man ſit down, and think of boundleſs Mercy and Compaſſion, and of a God whoſe very Nature is Love, and then let him ſay, if an Expectation that he ſhould thus reveal himſelf, be not the moſt reaſonable Expectation that can enter into the Mind of Man.

Once more : If it be a main End of God's Government, to promote the Happineſs of each Rank of Beings according to their Nature and Capacities, we cannot ſuppoſe a Number of Creatures deſtroying themſelves in any Way, that can come within the Reach and Terms of Mercy, but that God ſhould interpoſe and ſay, *In me is thine Help*. And if we look upon a Creature as loſing all Happineſs thro' Guilt, or thro' Diſtemper and Weakneſs, or thro' the uſurped Power and Tyranny of others, there is no conceiving of its being reſtor'd to Happineſs again, without a Revelation of God's Will to pardon, and of the Way of obtaining that Pardon ; nor without ſome additional Strength provided, and ſome ſufficient Remedy to reſtore a weak diſtemper'd Creature to Health and Vigour again ;

again; nor without some Displays of Power and Wisdom, to rescue out of the Hands of a Tyrant and Destroyer.

That the Governour of the World should upon these Considerations, and in these Exigencies, make a Revelation of himself, and of his Mind and Will to Mankind, is probable to a Degree, that one can hardly help concluding that it must be so.

This Conclusion is so strong and clear, that all Sorts of Men, both the Philosophers and the Vulgar, both the polite and ruder Nations of the World have given into it. And upon this Persuasion, have the Pretensions of receiving Things immediately by Revelation from the Gods, run thro' the whole Pagan World. Sometimes Things were said to be delivered from God by *Voices*, and speaking Oracles, an hollow Sound coming out from an Image, or from behind a Wall, with some Words of doubtful Signification, that might secure the Honour of the Oracle which Way soever the Inquirer should act, or the Affair should issue. At other Times, *Apparitions* and *Visions* were contrived to be the

Directors of Mens Minds, and the Promoters of some extraordinary Actions and Undertakings. Revelations also were pretended by *Dreams*, and this became a considerable Study with Men of Learning and Philosophy, who have laid down Rules for right interpreting these, so as to know the Mind and Will of the Deity from thence. In one of those Dreams Mr. *Dodwell* seems to have been, when he imagines the Oneriocritical Rules of the Heathen were studied by the Sons of the Prophets in *Israel*, while they were Candidates for extraordinary Revelation. Sometimes the Heathens represented their Gods as appearing in human Shapes, or in the Shape of some other living Creatures, and so conveying the Notices of Things to them.

It does not seem unlikely that in some one, or more of these Ways, God did really, upon proper Occasions, make Discoveries of himself: And from the traditionary Accounts of those, Lawgivers, and Founders of Commonwealths, Persons of an enterprizing Genius, both Priests and Laymen, and possibly evil Spirits might take the Hint, and introduce, to serve their several Purposes, numberless delusive Appearances and Pretensions of this Kind.

Kind. However, these Pretensions would never have been made, or met with so general a Regard in the World, if there had not been an universal Expectation, that God could, and would reveal himself, where the Exigencies of Mankind required it, and where proper Applications were made to him, for such additional Light and Assistance as they found they could not do without. In short, the Notion of a Revelation appeared so expedient and beneficial to Mankind, and had such a kindly Influence on their most valuable Interests, that the wisest and most learned Men among the Heathens write upon it, as the most reasonable and necessary Thing that could be advanced. There is a known and most remarkable Passage, in *Plato's Alcibiades*, to this Purpose, which may serve instead of many. *Plato* introducing *Alcibiades*, consulting with *Socrates* about the best Method of Praying to the Deity, tells him, that the best Way both for *Alcibiades* and himself was, " To wait 'till some greater Person, than
 " They, should arise, who should be able to
 " teach them exactly, how they were to be-
 " have both toward God, and toward Man."
 And when it is inquired, " When shall that
 " Time

“ Time come, O *Socrates*! And who shall
 “ that Teacher be?” It is replied, “ This
 “ is no other than He under whose Care thou
 “ art.”

I am well aware, that these Arguments which have been produced for the Probability of a Revelation, will be thought by some to prove too much; and so to raise a very strong *Objection* against the Doctrine they are design'd to establish. It may, perhaps, be said, for I know on alike Occasion it has often been suggested, that the Necessities of Mankind are as great, and their Happiness is as much to be considered in one Part of the World as in another. And the Honour of the Common Maker and Great Universal Governour of the World, is as much concerned, in the Display of his Perfections, to those that live in the darkest Parts of *Asia*, *Africa*, or *America*, as in *BRITAIN*; and the securing of the general Order and Harmony of Things does as much call for supernatural Revelations in one Kingdom, and one Part of the World, as another. This Way of Reasoning must either hold good every where, or it cannot be perfectly just any where.

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In Answer to this Objection; which, I think, is thus put in its full Force, I desire it may be observed; that it is not just to infer, that because a Revelation, in the general, may be reasonably expected, therefore it must be to all Parts of the World alike. For God to reveal himself, and his Will, in an extraordinary Way, is, in the very Notion of the Thing, an extraordinary Favour. And, surely, the supreme Governour of the World is not oblig'd to dispense his Favours to all equally and alike. Infinite Wisdom has seen fit to form a vast Variety of Creatures; and to endow his rational Creatures with very different Capacities, and to intrust them with very different Talents: Some are better form'd for receiving Light, and acquiring Knowledge; some are more advantageously situated, both to do, and receive Good, than others are. And yet, no Man argues, that because these are Privileges actually conferred upon some, and may, in every Part and Age of the World, be expected to be bestow'd on some; no Man, I say, thence argues, that therefore they ought to be communicated to all in the same Proportion and Degree. The
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Case is the very same here. God, as Sovereign Ruler of the World, may choose what Place and People he pleases, as the Objects of this distinguishing Favour. He may fix the Symbols, or Tokens, of his Presence, in what Part of the Earth he sees fit. He may give more particular Manifestations of his Pleasure to one Nation, than he does to another, as consistently with his Wisdom and Justice, as he gives a more temperate Climate, greater Advantages of Traffick, greater Opportunities and Helps for improving their Minds, to the Inhabitants of one Kingdom, than to those of another, or greater Measures of natural Reason to one Person than he does to another. And whenever he does give any peculiar Discoveries of his Mind and Will to any Kingdom or City, he justly may expect that the Attention and Regard of the rest of the World should be drawn thither: It is but reasonable, that all about them, who come to have any Notice of such a Discovery, should make the most humble and diligent Inquiries. And, if God gives it in Charge to those who are first favoured with these special Manifestations, that they should, upon the common Principles of Humanity, do

do what they can to rescue their whole Nature from Delusion and Misery, from Ignorance, Error, and Vice ; in this, he most graciously consults the Good of All, by the special Favours conferred originally upon a Few. And this will hold in arguing from one Nation and Kingdom to another, as well as from an inspired Person to his uninspired Neighbour. And if the Principles of Revelation have their designed and proper Effect, they will warm Men with a becoming Zeal to communicate the Notices of them to others, and to bring all they can to receive them, and yield themselves to the Tendency and Design of them.

It is indeed in every Respect more agreeable to the common Principles of Reason and Humanity, thus to make Men Instructors to one another, than needlessly to multiply extraordinary Revelations. For should God draw the Attention of Men continually to Revelations of Things from Heaven, they would be less careful to improve their reasonable Capacities, and would become less sociable, and less affected to one another. By Means of a Proneness which there is in our

Nature to emulate one another, and seek Pre-eminence, the Revelations granted to one People would be set against those granted to another ; and thus, instead of being united in pursuit of one common Salvation, they would be in perpetual Contentions about the *special Favours* granted to each of them ; and would make separate Interests, according to the Views that each Nation had to serve in their present Governments and Disposals of Things. It has been owing to this, that so many false Pretenses to Revelation have been made, in different Parts of the World. And to prevent such Contentions, it is not more reasonable to expect, that there will be a Revelation, than it is to believe, that there will be but one ; and that that ought to be universally received by all, as well as by those who are first favoured with it. A Thought this, that is very capable of being improved, so as to be made a Criterion or distinguishing Mark of that Revelation which is really and truly from God ; namely, that which is most fit for all Mankind to receive, and which would be equally beneficial to all People that cordially embrace it.

It is highly reasonable to expect, that any divine Revelation, that is suited to answer the Exigencies of the whole human Race, shall, in one Way or other, sooner or later, extend to all Nations and Languages upon Earth. Its Progress may be very slow, thro' the Abuses to which it is liable in those very Places where it is received; some Men, for Want of Faith, Integrity, and a teachable Disposition, continually misrepresenting it and cavilling against it; and others using it to serve the base Purposes of Tyranny and Cruelty; which shall disgrace it to By-standers. The Powers and Interests of Men, in other Places, may make them afraid of Alterations being introduced, which may prove dangerous to their respective Governments, which are settled and stand quiet, and easy, upon a different Foot in Matters of Religion. And the Vices of Men, every where, will oppose those Notices of Things, which would controul and subdue them. For these Reasons, a Revelation from God must be expected to make but slow Advances; but this is owing wholly to the great Degeneracy and Corruption of Mankind, and to the Disorders of

the World, which make them so difficultly admit of the Remedy that God has provided, and ordered to be transmitted to them. But from the Nature of the Thing, and from Observation and Experience, it is still no Way unreasonable to imagine and hope, that a Revelation actually coming from God, and sufficiently attested and confirmed, shall gradually advance in its Credit, and obtain a wider Spread; and at last, bear down and triumph over all Opposition, from Delusion, Enthusiasm, Vice, and Imposture.

Besides, it is well worth observing on this Argument, that some *general Principles* may be propagated, and thereby the general Order of Things render'd, in some Degree, more secure, by Means of a Revelation made to one Part of the Earth, tho' the Revelation itself should not be universally known and received. For Example; the Worship of *Idols*, and the Brute, or inanimate Parts of the Creation, may be brought into Disrepute, and laid aside all over the World, by the true God discovering himself, and the right Way of worshipping him in some *principal Kingdoms* of the World. False
and

and delusive *Oracles* may be silenced, and Men may grow into a Contempt of them, by a generally received Notion of God's revealing himself, and his Will, in some *better attested*, and more certain Way. The Barbarity of *human* Sacrifices, and all *bloody* Sacrifices may cease, upon the Assurances given of God's pardoning Sin, and providing a Ransom and Expiation another Way, which is more worthy of the Divine Being to accept, and more satisfactory to the Consciences of Men to rely upon. The rational Conviction of this, and the Belief of a divine Revelation, in some leading Parts of the World, (for Wisdom, Power, and Traffick) which shall put an End to all bloody Sacrifices among themselves, may also destroy the Use of them, and call Men off from all mistaken Reliances on such Ways of Propitiating the Deity, in the other Nations of the World, which, as yet, are unacquainted with that special Revelation from God, and that Ransom ordained by himself, which brought all bloody Sacrifices to be first laid aside. These being real Facts, and not meer Suppositions only, in the Prevalence of Christianity, do most fully vindicate this Way of Reasoning.

For,

For, whether Christianity be in Truth what it pretends to be, or not, (which I shall refer to a farther Inquiry) yet it appears, beyond all Dispute, from the Settling it in *Judea*, and in the *Roman* Empire, and some other Parts of the World, that many general Principles have spread, and been received from thence, (particularly in the Examples just given) that have been copied, and prevailed thro' other Parts of the World; and, by that Means, many flagrant Disorders are corrected or prevented, which arose from those barbarous Customs now destroyed, although Christianity itself be not understood, or received, in many of those Places where those Customs did formerly prevail.

F I N I S.

